



# **NATIONAL LABOR RELATIONS BOARD**

**WASHINGTON, D.C. 20570**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**Friday, September 8, 1995**

**(R-2099)**  
**202/273-1991**

**WALTER P. REUTHER**  
**25TH COMMEMORATIVE TRIBUTE**

**"IN MEMORY OF WALTER PHILIP REUTHER"**

**Delivered by:**

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**Chairman**  
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**September 8, 1995**  
**Orchestra Hall**  
**Detroit, Michigan**

Along with Hillman, Lewis, Murray, Randolph and Bridges, he walked across the stage of history in a bygone time of turbulence, success and stability for the American labor movement. The name of Walter Philip Reuther was synonymous with what was regarded as both dynamic and aggressive in the labor movement and he stood second to none as a proponent of what is authentic, innovative and robust in trade unions.

My first impression and recollections of Walter Reuther are based upon Detroit in the 1940s and, specifically, the riots of 1943 during World War II. Twenty years before the March on Washington, the labor movement was hardly seen as a friend of civil rights. But Walter Reuther's support for racial equality and civil rights laws cut against the grain of traditional union leadership and American society at that time.

The policies promoted by Mr. Reuther and other UAW leaders put the union on the side of fair employment practices legislation well in advance of its time. And, most important, in the tumult of Detroit in the '40s, when white auto workers refused to work alongside of blacks on the production line and both threatened and engaged in violence as a response, Reuther insisted that all union members work together and faced his opponents down on this and related issues.

As a student at Cornell Law School during the winter of '59-'60, I was exposed to the podium thumping inspirational speech that the "Redhead" could give so often. I vividly recall a variation on some of those same themes later at the Cadillac Square 1960 Presidential Campaign Labor Day rally addressed by Mr. Reuther, Senator John Kennedy, Governor G. Mennen Williams and Lt. Governor John Swainson.

As the most junior of the UAW legal staff, I had very little direct contact with Mr. Reuther. The most memorable of these was early September 1960, as I was about to complete my summer clerkship with the union and return to Cornell. The UAW General Counsel, Harold Cranefield, ushered me into the president's office at Solidarity House. I recall that most of the discussion was about the '60 presidential campaign. Norman Vincent Peale had just attacked Senator Kennedy on the ground that his Roman Catholicism disqualified him to be President. I believe that our meeting took place prior JFK's spirited and eloquent defense in Houston in response to a similar line of attack by a group of Protestant ministers in Texas.

I recall Reuther speaking at length about his hopes for a Kennedy presidency and his lamentations about and dismay with Peale's criticism in particular. He expressed profound disappointment with Peale and likened the religious criticism of Kennedy to other forms of bigotry present in so much of the country.

Most of his other remarks were focused upon public policy issues like Medicare, federal aid to education and foreign policy. It was left to me to offer some views on the role of labor law at the end of a conversation of about 20 to 30 minutes -- an "unusually long meeting," General Counsel Cranfield commented to me as we left Reuther's office.

The Walter Reuther that I knew was an exemplary labor leader and more. He was a unique player on the world stage at a critical time in the development of industrial democracies. Industry representatives who faced him across the bargaining table considered him a master negotiator. But his vision of his role and that of trade unionism in an industrial democratic society was infinitely broader than that of most of his union contemporaries and captains of industry as well.

Reuther, more than any other individual, built the UAW into a fine and first-rate industrial union and developed the UAW's whipsawing or pattern bargaining strategy and used it to win wages and innovative benefit programs and contract provisions that frequently set the pattern throughout industry.

Reuther was one of the first and strongest supporters of cooperation with the introduction of new technology and improved productivity so long as resulting benefits were shared with the auto workers. The bargaining was hard, but the relationship evolved in the 1950s and 60s into one based on mutual respect and trust on both sides and, ultimately into experiments like Saturn and the GM-Toyota joint venture -- both of which, had he lived, I suspect Reuther would have approved.

As president of the CIO, Reuther was largely responsible with AFL President Meany for the merged federation in 1955. At a time when there was a great deal of opposition to the merger, Reuther saw the wisdom of it. Subsequently, he presided over the newly-created Industrial Union Department (IUD).

The UAW was never touched by the corruption that for many years tainted other major unions. Under Reuther, the UAW established a Public Review Board composed of eminent academics and citizens outside the union to provide an independent avenue of appeal for members of decisions by union officers which they considered unfair.

As my conversation with him those 35 years ago this month made clear to me, Walter Reuther's vision was much broader than his union and the U.S. auto industry. He had a great interest in politics and foreign policy. He campaigned for Norman Thomas in 1932 and later for Roosevelt, Truman and Kennedy.

He was an early and strong supporter of the Marshall Plan. He forged links with established and nascent industrial unions around the world. As a founder of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and head of the World Automotive Department of the International Metal Workers Federation, he

anticipated by many years the need which is so apparent today for worldwide trade union communications and unity to assure that worker rights and interests are not forgotten in the developing global market. He was a drum major for procedures which would effectively develop and implement international labor standards.

Mr. Reuther was an early supporter and an active participant in the civil rights movement. He walked arm and arm with Martin Luther King, Roy Wilkins and so many other civil rights leaders in the August 1963 March on Washington. His vision of industrial democracy realized in the UAW and CIO still serves as a model mechanism for peacefully accomplishing the myriad adjustments essential in emerging free democratic industrial nations.

Walter Reuther was one of those rare individuals whose every action in life embodied his philosophy. He tied it all together -- his austere morality, democratic ideals, his faith in progress, his belief in civil rights and equal opportunity, internationalism and of course his belief in a strong, independent, democratic trade union movement.

His was a life of action dedicated to furthering these beliefs. At the core of his philosophy was an unwavering sense of justice and fairness that is possessed by our greatest leaders. And he possessed a sense of duty to help the have-nots, the weak, the common man. This was the side he was on and for which he fought. Reuther's untimely death deprived us of a visionary labor leader. All of us here today were touched by his life. His beliefs influenced our own. Our country benefited from his good works. It is meet and right that we honor him here today.

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